Abstract

Researchers and policymakers working on prosperity, happiness and wellbeing in the UK have recently reworked GDP-centred notions of progress and identified community and belonging as major determinants of a good life. The dominant notion of community in most writing on this topic draws on Putnam's work on social capital as measured by trust and/or civic engagement. This approach, however, captures only the social aspect of community, without addressing the symbolic dimension of political discourses and their national and local effects. Using data from Newham, London, this article argues that a narrow focus on social capital obfuscates the complexity of community dynamics, leading to misconceptions about the causes of social fragmentation. In the case of Newham, we show that while survey data on social capital suggests that diversity is detrimental to community life, a more nuanced analysis reveals that it is in fact an important part of community cohesion.

Community and Prosperity Beyond Social Capital:
The Case of Newham, East London

NIKOLAY MINTCHEV AND HENRIETTA L. MOORE

Institute for Global Prosperity, University College London, London, UK

What is a community and why is community-building important in today's world? What does it take for a community to flourish and to help improve the lives of those who are a part of it? In recent years, researchers and policymakers working on prosperity, happiness and wellbeing have reworked traditional notions of progress based on material wealth, and identified community and belonging as major determinants of a good life (e.g. Layard 2011, Legatum Institute 2015, New Economic Foundation 2009, Stiglitz et al., 2010). They have emphasized that the quality of our communities should be included in the way we measure and assess our quality of life, without subordinating it to economic growth. In many of these works, the dominant notion of community is derived from Robert Putnam's influential book *Bowling Alone* (2000; see also Putnam 1995). In this work, Putnam defines the quality of community life in terms of 'social capital' as measured by the level of trust that people have in relation to others (social connectivity), as well as the level of participation in various organizations and activities (civic engagement). In this article we claim that one of the strengths of Putnam's theory is that it offers a way to rigorously measure the quality of community life, and to determine its correlation to wellbeing indicators such as life satisfaction and physical and mental health. However, we also argue that theories of wellbeing and prosperity that draw on Putnam's theory tend to overemphasizes the social aspects of community life without sufficiently addressing the importance of symbolic meanings that the concept of community holds for people on the ground. Using original interview data from a pilot study in the London Borough of Newham, we show that a narrow focus on social relations can obfuscate the complex nature of community dynamics and lead to

misinterpretations of the causes of social fragmentation. In the case of Newham, we show that while the survey data on social capital suggests that there is a local problem with managing ethnic diversity, a more nuanced analysis reveals that diversity is in fact integral to community cohesion, while problems of social fragmentation are linked to deprivation and inequality.

How then do studies on happiness, prosperity and wellbeing make use of Putnam's social capital theory? In his ground-breaking book *Happiness* (2011), Richard Layard – an economics professor and member of the UK's House of Lords – argues that the quality of community life is one of the 'big seven' factors that define personal happiness, with other categories in the 'big seven' including 'financial situation', health and personal freedom (2011: 62-63). This, according to him, is because '[t]he quality of our community is crucial for whether we make friends and how safe we feel' (2011: 68). Layard then draws a link between community life, social capital and trust:

> Researchers call the quality of the community 'social capital.' It is not easy to assess it, but one good measure is to ask people, 'Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?' (2011: 68).

In a similar fashion, the *2015 Legatum Prosperity Index*, includes in its measure of prosperity a 'Social Capital sub-index' which 'measures countries' performance in two areas: social cohesion and engagement, and community and family networks' (2015: 39). The New Economic Foundation's report *National Accounts of Well-Being* (2009) also emphasizes the importance of community. The report includes 'Trust and belonging' as an indicator of social wellbeing, explaining that the category refers to '[t]rusting other people, being treated fairly and respectfully by them, and feeling a sense of belonging with and support from people where you live' (2009: 21).

But, in addition to being beneficial on their own terms, social capital and fulfilling community life can also impact physical and mental health, which are core determinants of wellbeing. As Wilkinson and Pickett (2010: 77-79) argue, there is a strong correlation between social capital, health, and life expectancy. Drawing on research carried out at Harvard School of Public Health (Kabachi et al. 1997) on different states in the US, Wilkinson and Pickett claim that the number of deaths from various preventable diseases correlates with levels of social capital in specific states (social capital, in this case is measured by participation in local organizations such as volunteer groups, churches and unions, which is underlined by a sense of trust between members (Putnam 1995: 73)).

> This measure of group membership turned out to be a strong predictor of deaths from all causes combined, as well as deaths from coronary heart disease, cancers, and infant death rates. The higher the group membership, the lower the death rate (Wilkinson and Pickett 2010: 79).

Data from Europe leads to a similar conclusion. In their analysis of the European Social Survey, Huppert et al. (2009: 309-310) conclude that symptoms of clinical depression are strongly correlated with 'a reduced likelihood of being treated with respect', as well as 'reduced likelihood of having done voluntary work'. These findings confirm that a strong community – as defined by social capital, which in turn

is defined by trust in others and/or civic engagement – is a crucial factor of happiness, wellbeing and prosperity.

But what does it take for a community to have high levels of social capital and thus become happy or prosperous? According to Layard, the happy community is the stable community. This, for him, comes into conflict with the logic of economic growth, in which mobility is a good thing because it benefits the economy.

> A high-turnover community is rarely friendly. Yet economists are generally in favour of geographical mobility since it moves people from places where they are less productive to ones where they are more productive. But geographical mobility increases family break-up and criminality…[I]f people are more mobile, they feel less bonded to the people among whom they live, and crime is more common (2011: 179-180).

Layard's conclusion has gloomy implications for high population turnover, but also for immigration and ethnic diversity. In fact Putnam, whose work forms the bedrock of Layard's argument here, has elaborated his theory of social capital to argue that ethnic diversity has a negative impact on community cohesion (Putnam 2007). Layard himself pays little attention to this issue, but he does mention in the second edition of *Happiness* that becoming aware of Putnam's research on diversity has made him 'even less enthusiastic about migration' (2011: 316). Layard's scepticism about immigration is in line with the work of Paul Collier (2014: ch. 5), who offers an elaborate discussion of the negative effect of immigration/diversity. Collier, like Layard, draws on Putnam's work to argue that high levels of immigration are detrimental to community life and happiness. He claims that low levels of immigration may indeed lead to positive economic and social outcomes, but large numbers of immigrants will likely be a disruptive presence for the host society: 'both the economic and the social effects [of rapid immigration] would most probably be adverse for host populations' (2014: 136). These remarks by Layard and Collier suggest that theorizing community in terms of social capital leads to the conclusion that stability and ethnic homogeneity are good for prosperity, while rapid change and ethnic diversity can in fact be detrimental.

In this article we concur with Layard and others that market-centred ideas are insufficient for understanding community prosperity. However, using new data on diversity from a pilot study in the London Borough of Newham, we argue that the theory of community used in their research is too narrowly focused on social relations and undertheorizes the effects of discourse. In our research we examined the locally-specific cultural constructions of the good life in Newham. We found that 'community' was commonly evoked as an important aspect of what makes Newham a good place to live, but also that the term had two different symbolic meanings, corresponding to different sets of social relations – one which includes everyone in the area, and another which only refers to a small group of diverse but socially engaged residents.

Taking this dimension of symbolic/discursive meaning into account has important theoretical and methodological implications. Theoretically, as we show below, discourse and naming have significant consequences for the psychology of identity and the organization of social relations. A theory that addresses the symbolic aspects of community – specifically the ways in which the term is constructed, circulated and used by various social actors – can tell us much more about social life

than one that omits this symbolic dimension. Methodologically, the symbolic aspect of community faces the issue of being extremely difficult to measure and aggregate. On the positive side, however, a symbolic approach helps us to be more sensitive to the ambiguity of the concept of community as used by social actors, and to avoid reifying it into a narrow academic category incongruent with people's complex experiences. A symbolic approach, in other words, allows us to operationalize the concept and understand its meanings, uses and effects in a specific political, demographic, and historical context – something which the one-size-fits-all notion of community as defined by trust and/or civic engagement is not nuanced enough to achieve. In light of this, we put forth a multi-dimensional theory of community – one based on social relations and symbolic representations as closely intertwined – in order to better understand the relationship between community and prosperity. We specifically focus on the Stratford area in the London Borough of Newham – an ethnically diverse area with a long history of migration and high population turnover – to find out if ethnic diversity and demographic change do in fact lead to poor quality of community as Layard and others suggest.

The social and the symbolic: community reconsidered

Social relations are core aspects of community but they comprise only one dimension of it. Another dimension is that of symbolic representations which circulate at the national and local levels (Author). The symbolic aspects of community have been famously theorized before. Anthony Cohen (1985), for example, argues that communities are 'symbolically constructed' – they are based on their members' identification with shared symbols. Benedict Anderson's (1983) theory of nations as 'imagined communities' is also based on a symbolic approach. For him, the circulation of media representations allows people to identify with others whom they have never met in person, and to imagine a commonality with them that creates a sense of national belonging. Furthermore, as a number of authors show, discourse and naming have the power to transform the way in which objects, actions, individuals and groups are perceived in everyday life (e.g. Appiah 2001; Butler 1993: ch. 7; Author). As Ruth Levitas puts it '…the idea of discourse underlines the fact that the matrix of concepts through which we understand the social world and act in it profoundly affects those actions and thus the world itself, without denying the material character of social relations' (1998: 3).

What is more, the act of naming – specifically when it comes to race, gender, class and sexuality – has the potential to inscribe identity onto the subject and to shape its relationships to self and others. Kwame Anthony Appiah summarizes this point concisely:

> Once labels are applied to people, ideas about people who fit the label come to have social and psychological effect…So the labels operate to mould what we may call identification, the process through which individuals intentionally shape their projects – including the plans for their own lives and their conception of the good life – by reference to available labels, available identities (Appiah 2001: 322).

Appiah's argument refers to labels such as race, gender, and sexuality – what does it mean to be labelled black or white, female or male, straight or gay? These questions

are crucial for understanding wellbeing and prosperity and the life trajectories through which people succeed or fail to attain the good life. We would argue, however, that Appiah's theory is also applicable to the concept of community, as well as related concepts such as anti-social behaviour and volunteering. What does it mean to be a member of the community? What does the valorisation of volunteer work do to the act of volunteering? What happens when someone is called a responsible citizen while someone else is labelled 'anti-social'?

Consider as an example the notion of volunteering discussed earlier. On one level – that of social relations and their psychological effects – volunteer work, as the data shows, can be potentially beneficial for wellbeing. But on another level, the circulation of political discourses about the benefits of volunteering can also create new regimes of power and exclusion. As Levitas (1998: 125-126) argues, the emphasis that the New Labour government in the UK put on the importance of volunteering in the 1990s created a new conception of what it means to be a good citizen and community member. As a result, those who volunteered fit within this conception while those who didn't were excluded from the label, and were by definition not good citizens. In such a discursive context, 'volunteering begins to appear not all that voluntary' (1998: 126), it becomes obligatory if one is to be recognized as a good citizen in the eyes of the state and of fellow citizens. '[T]hose who do not choose to help are by implication lesser citizens, as well as less "developed" as individuals' (1998: 126). Volunteering, in this instance, in no longer just a way of making the neighbourhood a better place or improving one's own wellbeing; it is now also a way of judging people's worth as citizens.

Similar concerns have been expressed about the concepts of happiness (Ahmed 2010) and wellbeing (Cederström and Spicer 2015). As Ahmed (2010) argues, the idea of happiness can become co-opted by normative regimes of power that regulate social behaviour, often with sexist, homophobic, and racist consequences. Ahmed supports her claim using the tropes of the 'feminist killjoy', the 'unhappy queer', and the 'melancholic migrant', all of whom refuse to comply with hegemonic regimes of identity for one reason or another (justice, love, a past racial injury…). These figures, she argues, are often seen as stubbornly senseless because by refusing to comply with the symbolic law they are ruining their happiness, and sometimes also the happiness of others. Similarly, Cederström and Spicer (2015) claim that the institutional promotion of wellbeing in many western countries is underpinned by a new image of the good person, namely, 'someone who is autonomous, potent, strong-willed, and relentlessly striving to improve herself' (2015: 6). But, the downside to this project is that a constant social and institutional pressure to fashion oneself in accordance with this image often causes guilt, anxiety, self-blame, and depression, which are actually detrimental to physical and mental wellbeing. Such critiques, to be sure, do not nullify the analytical and political value of happiness and wellbeing theories; the fact remains that we need to develop and promote alternatives to narrow materialism if we plan to address the crisis of planetary sustainability (Jackson 2011, Author). Instead, the point we should take from these critiques is that happiness, wellbeing and prosperity have a powerful symbolic side to them, and we should be cautious about their potential use in the service of power and exclusion.

The concept of community and its political life in the UK, 1997-2015

Since the late 1990s the concept of community in the UK has itself become a central facet of political discourse and policy decisions. This was the case firstly under New Labour (Levitas 1998: ch. 5, 6; Imre and Raco 2003; Hale 2006; Wallace 2010), and secondly, under the Conservative-led coalition and its ideology of 'the Big Society' (Levitas 2012, Westwood 2011, Wiggan 2012). The New Labour governments of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown (but especially the former) used the concept of community in a number of policy areas including, welfare, housing, and urban regeneration (Fremeaux 2005: 267). Their community-based politics were grounded in the views that devolution of power leads to more responsive governance, and that people's identities (and therefore aspirations to contribute to society) are locally-grounded and must be locally governed (Levitas 1998: 125).

New Labour's ideology of citizenship and community, emphasized that with rights and benefits come obligations. Access to welfare, housing, social inclusion, belonging and respect – in short access to prosperity – was not unconditional, but dependent on people's ability to meet their obligations as law-abiding community members. Community became a short-hand for those who followed the rules, as opposed to those who engaged in 'anti-social behaviour', defined as 'causing trouble, annoyance or suffering to the community at large' (Metropolitan Police, 2016). In this discursive opposition between the community and its adversaries, the latter were seen as a problem that had to be addressed through policing, moralization, and social programs (Wallace 2016: 32).

When the Conservative-led coalition succeeded New Labour in 2010, it espoused a similar commitment to tackling anti-social behaviour, albeit with a more victim-focused emphasis (Heap 2016). The Coalition also remained committed to devolution of power and community governance. This approach tallied with the more fundamental conservative agenda to minimize the role of government and to make communities and individuals more self-reliant (Wiggan 2012).

However, discourses about community cohesion in Britain were not only about the politics of social exclusion and inequality, but also about the politics of multiculturalism. Class identity and cultural/ethnic/racial identity each form the basis of competing models about how British society is divided, who gets left out, and what needs to be done to improve social cohesion. New Labour's emphasis on responsibility, in continuation with earlier Thatcherite trends, undermined the significance of class-based politics and even made the concept of class taboo (Edwards et al. 2012: 4). As a result, people who previously identified as members of the working class, and who suffered from the economic and social hardships of deindustrialization, were now expected to assume personal responsibility for moving up the social ladder as opposed to relying on organized labour movements. Yet, at the same time, New Labour supported a multiculturalism in which 'community life for black and Asian people living in relatively poor neighbourhoods was configured *not* through language pertaining to the socio-economic commonalities of a multiracial British working class, but through dominant discourses of racial, ethnic and cultural distinctiveness' (Edwards et al. 2012: 5). In terms of class, people (especially white Britons) who fell out economically and socially were stigmatized and excluded. In terms of ethnic/racial identity, minority communities were supported by the government in virtue of their minority status, and offered resources to fulfill their culturally specific needs (Edwards et al. 2012, Evans 2012).

From the mid-2000s onwards, however, this multicultural policy created a backlash, especially in the aftermath of the 7/7 London attacks and a series of riots in Bradford, Oldham and Burnley (Sodha 2016). In the aftermath of these events, public

figures were now arguing that because of multiculturalism, Britain's ethnic communities lived 'parallel lives', while Britain itself was 'sleepwalking to segregation' (Finnay and Simpson 2009). Political discourse was now increasingly concerned with criticizing multiculturalism and emphasizing the importance of bringing ethnic communities together. As David Cameron put it in a 2011 speech:

> Under the doctrine of state multiculturalism, we have encouraged
> different cultures to live separate lives…We've even tolerated these
> segregated communities behaving in ways that run completely counter
> to our values…This hands-off tolerance has only served to reinforce
> the sense that not enough is shared (Cameron 2011).

The quality of community life in Britain since the 1990s has thus been articulated along two defining axes, each unstable and subject to change: one axis based on class and social inequality, which were mostly articulated in terms of personal responsibility; and another based on ethnic division that prevented cultural communities from coming together into a single cohesive community.

The concept of community in London's East End

It is clear that the concept of community has been an important part of British politics over the past two decades. But if these discourses were disseminated at the state level, then what did community mean for people on the ground in Newham? How did local uses of the concept correspond to social capital (in Putnam's sense of the term) and social relations? How did the demographic composition of a place like Newham impact the quality of community life, wellbeing and prosperity?

London's East End has a reputation for being the historical home of Britain's most robust community spirit. The East End's white working class has long been portrayed in popular culture and academic writing as poor but proud, and always sticking together in the face of adversity (James 2015: 26-28). However, East London is also a historical entry point for immigrants, and since the 1960s it has become one of the most ethnically diverse places in Britain (Butler and Hamnett 2011: ch. 1).

The diversification of East London has transformed the notion of community and set the ground for two discourses on the relationship between community and diversity. The first of these is a narrative of loss in which immigration/diversity has alienated the old community spirit and replaced solidarity with ethnic animosity (James 2012: 26-28). In this discourse, 'white East London and a British blend of morality…is contrasted with the immorality of post-colonial non-white immigration' (James 2012: 27). The second discourse portrays a different scenario; in it, the community spirit of the new, diverse, East End is as strong as ever because people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds respect one another and commit to their shared neighbourhoods (e.g. McDermott 2015, Mumford and Power 2003). These two discourses are diametrically opposed – one is about interethnic tensions, the other about interethnic solidarity – but they are both grounded in social realities in the East End. In some places such as Tower Hamlets, there is indeed a history of conflict between indigenous white people and newcomers (Cornwell 1984: ch. 3, Cohen 2013, Dench et al. 2006). In Newham too, as James (2015: ch. 2) reports, some people express nostalgia for a lost white working class solidarity. Yet, at the same time parts of East London such as Hackney and Newham provide evidence that

diversity is in fact compatible with civility, respect for difference and a flourishing community life (Wessendorf 2014, McDermott 2015).

Within this context we ask what the concept of community means for people in Newham today, and what it can tell us about prosperity in the area. In the next section we set the background of our findings by presenting some key data about the demographic, economic and social conditions of the borough. Then, in the following section, we present some of our own interview data on residents in Stratford. The data was collected by a team of academics and 'citizen scientists' – local residents whom we recruited, hired and trained to assist us with the research, and who carried out interviews with people in their local neighbourhoods. We specifically focus on residents who were employed, and were therefore more likely to hold a privileged place within the ideological division between law-abiding 'aspirational' citizens and 'anti-social' groups. On the basis of our interviews, we found that many Stratford residents saw their community as ethnically diverse and took pride in being part of a multicultural and vibrant community life. However, we also found that inclusivity of ethnic difference coincided with the exclusion of social groups who were considered detrimental to local community life.

Newham: a short background

The Borough of Newham is one of the most deprived areas in London. According to the most recent data available, its average household income in 2013 was £34, 260, the second lowest in London after Barking and Dagenham (£34, 080), and significantly lower than the London average of £39, 100. As mentioned earlier, Newham is also extremely diverse. It has five ethnic groups (White British, Indian, African, Bangladeshi and Pakistani) that each make up 10% or more of the population, in addition to a number of smaller ethnic groups (CoDE 2013: 1). Newham, furthermore, has one of the highest population turnovers in all of London (Department for Communities and Local Government 2010; London Borough of Newham 2010). In 2007/2008 19.5% of residents either left or entered the borough – a significantly higher number from the London average of 13.6%. Much of this population churn was due to international migration, which in the same period accounted for 4.6% of the Newham population but only 3.5% of London's (London Borough of Newham 2010: 3). Considering these factors, it might be expected that in accordance with the aforementioned theories of Putnam and others, the quality of community life in Newham is quite poor. If diversity, immigration and high population churn all contribute to poor social capital, then surely social capital in Newham would suffer, as would wellbeing and prosperity more generally.

The available data on community and social capital in Newham points to contradictory conclusions. While some studies argue that social capital in the area is quite low (Smith 2001, Begum 2003), according to others this is not the case (Mumford and Power 2003: ch. 3, Watt 2013). The most recent, and perhaps most rigorous, quantitative evidence that we have on the topic is a 2009 Ipsos MORI poll, which asked people in England 'how well they think local residents from different backgrounds get on together'. This survey question does not directly measure levels of trust as Putnam's work does, but we think that 'getting on' resonates with social connectivity closely enough to serve as a homologous indicator of social capital. The poll found that 68.3% of Newham residents agreed with the statement – a figure which, although promising, is much lower than the 76% average of both London and

England (Ipsos MORI 2009: 32; Department of Communities and Local Government 2010: 13). What this poll captures well is a general feeling of social fragmentation and disconnection in Newham – one which is much more acute than in other parts of London. This, in turn, is reflected in people's narratives about local life. As Thompson et al. (2015) found out, '[n]arratives of social fragmentation were frequently encountered among Newham residents. [This was]…the social reflection…of a borough believed to be disconnected from local services and governance, and home to a transient and often isolated population' (2015: 25). In line with Putnam and Layard's theories, these findings correspond to high crime rates and low levels of life satisfaction. Newham, according to Ipsos MORI, has the lowest life-satisfaction in London and the highest perceptions of neighbourhood anti-social behaviour (Department of Communities and Local Government 2010: 32).

To tackle the borough's apparent community division, Newham council has devised a number of strategies to address both economic/social inequality and ethnic 'segregation' within the borough. In the recently published 'Sustainable Community Strategy' (Newham Partnership, n.d.), the mayor of Newham, Robin Wales, outlines a number of 'key principles' for community improvement, including 'building personal and economic capacity'. This entails 'challenging dependency on the state [while considering that] work is the only sustainable way out of poverty', as well as '[p]roviding alternative routes [for success] for young people not attracted or suited to academic learning' (Newham Partnership, n.d.: 4). The aim of this strategy is to offer people employment and training opportunities that will help them lift themselves out of poverty and welfare dependence, and become integrated members of the Newham community.

At the same time, however, Wales has also made efforts to stimulate ethnic integration in Newham by slashing funding for translation services and removing foreign language newspapers from libraries, while channeling funds into English language classes (Nye 2013, Sarwar 2014). These policies, according to critics, do very little for integration because they mainly impact elderly people who are the main users of the services in question (Sarwar 2014). Wales, furthermore, has pledged to refuse council funds for events that only involve a single ethnic or religious community. According to him, '[w]e won't support single ethnic or religious groups to do things themselves within those groups, it's not our job to support that…Our job is to support when people come together' (quoted in Nye 2013). Given the extreme diversity of Newham and the fact that its minority groups are very small and non-consolidated, it is questionable whether any ethnic or faith group can remain insular and exclusionary. As Wessendorf (2014) shows in her ethnography of Hackney, social contexts where diversity is so prevalent make it practically difficult, if not impossible, for people to not mix and to not be civil towards one another. In our experience, Wales's idea of including everyone resonated with the values of many Newham residents, and as our interview data show below, inclusiveness in cultural events could help people feel as a part of the community. However, we also found that our interviewees were not concerned with the area's ethnic diversity (on the contrary, they saw it as a good thing) but were rather anxious about the inequality, deprivation, and anti-social behaviour they witnessed on a daily basis. Yet while this situation is captured, at least in part, by the council's 'community strategy' for improving people's economic lives, neither quantitative studies on social capital, nor the theories of prosperity/happiness/wellbeing that make use of them are sensitive to the unstable balance between the axis of class and the axis of ethnic relations.

Close ethnographic consideration also shows that there is a more complex and multi-layered dynamic of community than a quantitative study on social capital can capture. In fact, it shows that there are two types of visions of community in Newham and therefore two levels of social capital operating simultaneously and overlapping: one type of community is cohesive and socially engaged, while the other is troubled by anti-social behaviour and tensions between different social groups. Vicky Cattell (2001) notes this duality in her study of social networks on a Newham estate, claiming that 'there is a thriving positive community which co-exists with the demoralized community' (2001: 1505). On the one hand, she says, '[f]ear of crime was a constant undercurrent. Residents suggested that coping with a deprived and hostile environment may be acting to damage close relationships' (2001: 1505). Yet, on the other hand, 'there are many very positive aspects of life on the estate [including]…opportunities for involvement in projects, self help groups, tenants' groups as well as courses, toy libraries and so on' (2001: 1505). Our findings lead to a similar conclusion about two communities, but they also point to the importance of diversity in local understandings of community. While Cattell hardly discusses diversity and ethnicity (perhaps because they were not salient concerns of the people she interviewed at the time), we emphasize that both versions of community in Newham – the vibrant and the demoralized – were seen as diverse.

Newham's two conceptions of community

The two conceptions of community discussed above were reflected in two different ways of speaking about community and belonging among the Stratford residents we interviewed. On some occasions, our interviewees referred to a multi-cultural network of people getting along, participating in common activities, and trying to create a welcoming environment for all. We call this group 'the community' because it had secured the strongest association with the term, not only among those who saw themselves as a part of it, but also for those who stood outside. This usage resonates with that promoted by New Labour, in which a socially engaged community is opposed to anti-social behaviour. Yet, at other times, people spoke about community and belonging with reference to everyone who lived in Newham, in which case crime, prostitution, and drug abuse contributed to weak community cohesion and a weakened feeling of belonging.

This duality was perhaps best illustrated by Halima,[1] a middle aged woman who moved to Newham in the early 1990s. When asked if she felt that she belonged, Halima expressed ambivalence: 'That's a tricky one actually, because I think I do in certain circumstances and then sometimes I feel really out of my depth...' She then elaborated what this meant. On the one hand, she had worked as an English teacher, and this made her feel an affinity with different migrant groups.

> In terms of feeling connected to the area, I have become increasingly connected…I've got lots of friends in the area and I also work in the area…Now I'm an [English] teacher in Newham so I feel very, like a strong connection to the area and I feel like I understand the community and various different community groups quite well…I actually really value it [the community] now.

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[1] The names of participants in the study have been changed to maintain their anonymity.

But, on the other hand, Halima also expressed discontent with the pronounced anti-social behaviour in her neighbourhood:

> We have had anti-social behaviour problems on our street…drugs and prostitution basically so at times I've felt fairly uncomfortable on my own street and that's a horrible feeling actually. But then you shut your door on it…then you forget about it. Mostly, I would say I feel comfortable and I feel belonging and I feel part of things.

Here the community (in the wider sense of the term) is fragmented because of anti-social behaviour, crime, illicit sex work and social inequality. These issues make it difficult for Halima to find a sense of belonging. But at the same time, 'the community' (in the narrow sense) is diverse yet cohesive because of cooperation and mutual respect. It is something that Halima is glad to be part of. As she put it herself, 'there is crime, definitely…but that's sort of made up by some really positive things like the diversity of the place and actually quite a lot of acceptance'.

Flora, another Stratford resident who originally came from continental Europe, referred to a similar dual experience of community and belonging. She expressed pride that in Newham people of different ethnicities get along well. Newham, she told us, should serve as an example for the world of how people live together. When we asked Flora what makes someone a member of the community, she explained that one must contribute to neighbourhood activities and actively engage with others. She then offered two examples of her own efforts to be an active member: in the first example, she volunteered at her children's school, while in the second, she took part in a Neighbourhood Watch to help her neighbours stand their ground against local crime

> Interviewer: Do you feel that you are part of the local community in Stratford?
>
> Flora: Yes
>
> Interviewer: What makes a member?
>
> Flora: When you contribute a bit…With the children's activities I used to go and help – if the children were taken to a museum I would be one of the parents along to help. Also, three years ago it got really nasty here with the crime. And as a street of really great neighbours we partnered together to form a Neighbourhood Watch and we started to really angrily stand our ground against the criminals...That makes me feel like a strong member of the community…

Here, Flora does not explicitly refer to the wider group of Newham residents as a community, but she does evoke the opposition between the law-abiding community and 'the criminals' who threaten its wellbeing. The community, according to her, is about reaching out, but as her Neighbourhood Watch example shows, it also comes together in opposition to anti-social adversaries who disrupt the peace of the neighbourhood.

But while in some cases opposition to anti-social behaviour helped bring neighbours together, in others trouble on the streets prevented people – especially non-established residents – from making friends. Priya, a woman in her twenties who lived in Stratford for five years, told us that she could never establish a connection with the community, despite her efforts to do so. She was fond of public events and gladly participated in them because they were inviting to everyone and brought the community together. However, problems with crime, drugs and prostitution made her feel unsafe and pressured her to stay at home. When asked about her experience of community, Priya responded with enthusiasm:

> Interviewer: How did you connect with your community…[in Stratford]?
>
> Priya: …When it was major events, like when the Olympic torch came, when it was…'Vaisakhi' [a Punjab festival] in Green Street, and when there was that fete going on…just off Woodgrange Road, and there was like clothes and food and cupcakes, and all sorts of things there. And then you just felt like, oh, this is everybody that lives in my community and everybody's come altogether no matter what their religion is, what their thoughts are and what kind of background they come from.

Later in the interview Priya emphasized that events like the Vaisakhi contribute to the multicultural spirit of community: they 'bring the whole community together so it wouldn't just be Asian people, it would be everybody…everyone came, and it was great...'.

Yet, at the same time, Priya explained that her efforts to be more involved were challenged by crime and illicit sex work:

> Everyone wants to look after themselves. If you're living in that sort of area, you know it's dangerous…you just don't want to get involved…You're worried that, oh god I live by myself and anyone can walk through my door right now. Because that's happened to us in the past…You know, people could knock on our doors and it was horrible…Once we had our doors getting knocked at, we thought, me and my neighbour thought it was her husband, we open the door and there was a prostitute standing right out there, outside our door, asking us to let her into our houses. Obviously we didn't let her…She started saying give us your phone…I was like, I'll call the police for you if you're having an issue, but yeah, things like that. You don't want to live in an area like that where you don't feel safe in your own home.

Priya saw herself as standing outside of 'the community'. She wanted to participate but could not do so because of fear for her safety. The problems in her neighbourhood were so conspicuous, and even intrusive, that she had to barricade herself instead of becoming socially involved.

Conclusion: community beyond social capital

Building a cohesive community by creating strong social bonds is an important aspect of happiness, wellbeing and prosperity. As we show in this article, one indicator for assessing the quality of community life is social capital as measured by trust and civic participation. Consequently, a good way to strengthen communities is to improve their levels of social capital. As the major texts on the topic suggest, this could be achieved by addressing the problems of (1) high population turnover, and (2) high levels of immigration and ethnic diversity. But, theorizing community exclusively in terms of social capital and social relations misses the crucial reality that people can have multiple experiences of community that link to the demographic composition of an area, as well as to its history, politics, and circulation of discourses. In Stratford, and in Newham more generally, there are two sets of community relations – one fragmented and characterized by poor levels of social capital, the other cohesive and engaged. The aforementioned Ipsos-MORI poll (2009) on people of different backgrounds 'getting on' captures the first aspect of this duality but not the second. It tells us that in Newham feeling of fragmentation and disconnectedness are far more prevalent then in other parts of London. Yet, what was not registered by the poll was that within the general feeling of fragmentation, many people were committed to, and actively working to create a vibrant community based on diversity and acceptance. This was a second set of social relations that was structured and organized by symbolic representations and ideas about what a community is and who ought to be included/excluded.

A comprehensive approach to community – one which addresses people's ideas about community and belonging, in addition to the quality of their social relationships – can lead to significant outcomes for understanding social dynamics and making policy recommendations. The people we interviewed in Stratford emphasized on numerous occasions that ethnic diversity was a positive thing, and that they took pride in being members of a diverse community. Recent ethnographic research confirms that this is also the case in other parts of East London (Wessendorf 2014). So in contrast to the findings of Putnam (2007) and others that ethnic diversity undermines community cohesion, our data – even if it is representative of only one group of Stratford residents – suggests that diversity can in fact be an integral and highly-valued part of a strong community.

But what must be emphasized is that in the context of deprivation, anti-social behaviour, and ideological polarization between 'the community' and its adversaries, it is easy to focus on the social fragmentation that the poll data so clearly reveals, and to lose sight of how valuable diversity is for whatever social cohesion there is in the area. This opens the door for a potentially dangerous misunderstanding of the causes of social fragmentation. At the present moment at least, building a stronger community in Stratford and Newham should have little to do with addressing ethnic diversity and much to do with social (but not ethnic) inclusion and exclusion. Those people whose wellbeing and prosperity benefit from social cohesion in the area are already a diverse group, and for them ethnic difference is not the main issue. For them, the problems are about poor access to housing and jobs with a living wage, as well as pronounced crime, drug culture, and illicit sex work, all of which keep the wider community divided. What this means for Newham is that any project of prosperity that is premised on building an inclusive community must address the deprivation and inequality at the heart of these issues. What it means for theories and policies of prosperity in general is that they must acknowledge that community life is a context-specific, multi-layered, social and symbolic phenomenon that goes beyond any single notion of social capital and social cohesion.

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Author
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